



State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

Wisconsin State Capitol

July 5, 2005

Thank you, Chief Justice Abrahamson. I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to take my oath of office from you—an oath to serve the people of Wisconsin for a second term as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Thank you, Governor and First Lady Jessica Doyle, for being here. Thank you to my colleagues—President Reilly, President Clancy, and President Wegenke, represented today by Mari McCarty, for our Pre-K through 16 partnership.

Thank you to my family—my husband and fellow educator, John: our children—Danielle, Judy and John—and all of you here today from throughout our great state for joining me and my administration in this celebration.

Assembled here in front of the bust of Robert LaFollette, and in the spirit of former Governor and Senator Gaylord Nelson, we come together to celebrate a new beginning in our state's rich and proud progressive tradition. Today we celebrate the foundation of government's highest endeavor—public education.

Over 150 years ago, our state's founders framed a constitution that committed our newborn state's resources to the greatest public good – educating our children. They looked, as we must, to ensure our future freedom and prosperity through a nation-leading public education system from local elementary schools through world-class colleges, universities, and public libraries.

Access to quality education and information has been a shared value and responsibility that has defined the excellence of our great state in the past and will most certainly define the future of our state for years to come.

It falls to each generation of Wisconsin citizens to guarantee access to quality public education and libraries.

On April 5th, a message was sent throughout our state that the public faith and commitment in our New Wisconsin Promise of a quality education for every child, and closing the gap in achievement between economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and their peers, is a top priority.

I stand here today honored to serve as chief advocate for our children and their education, sending the message loud and clear—Wisconsin citizens believe in their children and believe in the power of education.

Together, we accomplish much in our schools, libraries, technical colleges and university system through educators' devoted service—through parents' active involvement through community support—and through students' hard work.

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United behind public education, we expand the frontiers of the possible, one child at a time. United behind public education, we rise to the higher ground of common effort through community, not division through partisan politics.

Our progressive tradition recognizes that when we educate children from age four through higher education and workforce development, a long-term view must be held – we educate for life.

We must prepare every child in Wisconsin with the knowledge and skills they need to be productive, contributing citizens and lifelong learners of our 21st century global society.

We cannot support the shortsighted cutting of public education at all levels, but, rather, we must embrace public education as the best investment we as a society can make for our long-term economic security and the security of our American democracy.

We must support the power of our educators and our children's schools to effect change. Let our children's education lead the way against poverty, and joblessness. Let our children's education fuel intelligent, creative innovation, and dreams of the future.

Travel with me through our schools in every part of the state and listen to the stories of success. We know what works: quality teachers and strong leaders in every school...early childhood education... small class sizes ... nutrition programs...career and technical education... balanced literacy programs ...parental and community involvement and active engagement in learning, reducing barriers and providing opportunities for students to apply what is learned in the classroom to the real world.

You will also hear stories of the mounting challenges facing our schools and their students. Public education in Wisconsin is at a crossroads. Ask any student who lost an art, music, physical, business or technical education course this year; shrinking budgets result in fewer educational choices and options...Ask any laid off teacher; revenue caps mean cuts... Ask any parent or young adult unable to pay the bills; university and technical college tuition hikes are limiting futures...Ask any economist or any prison warden; quality public education brings long-term economic prosperity and societal savings.

We must rise above the loud squabbling of partisan politics that threatens to drown out our voices, that stands in the way of action. When we come together, we hear the voices of reason. Education not just for the private good—but the public good.

United, we must move: Forward in the belief that the days of our children will be better than our own; Forward in the belief that the spirit of every child must be preserved—not broken; Forward to raise the achievement of all students and close the achievement gap in the belief that opportunity for every child must not be postponed.

And, forward, ensuring our state's and nation's truest expression of freedom – a quality public education for this and future generations.

Thank you.